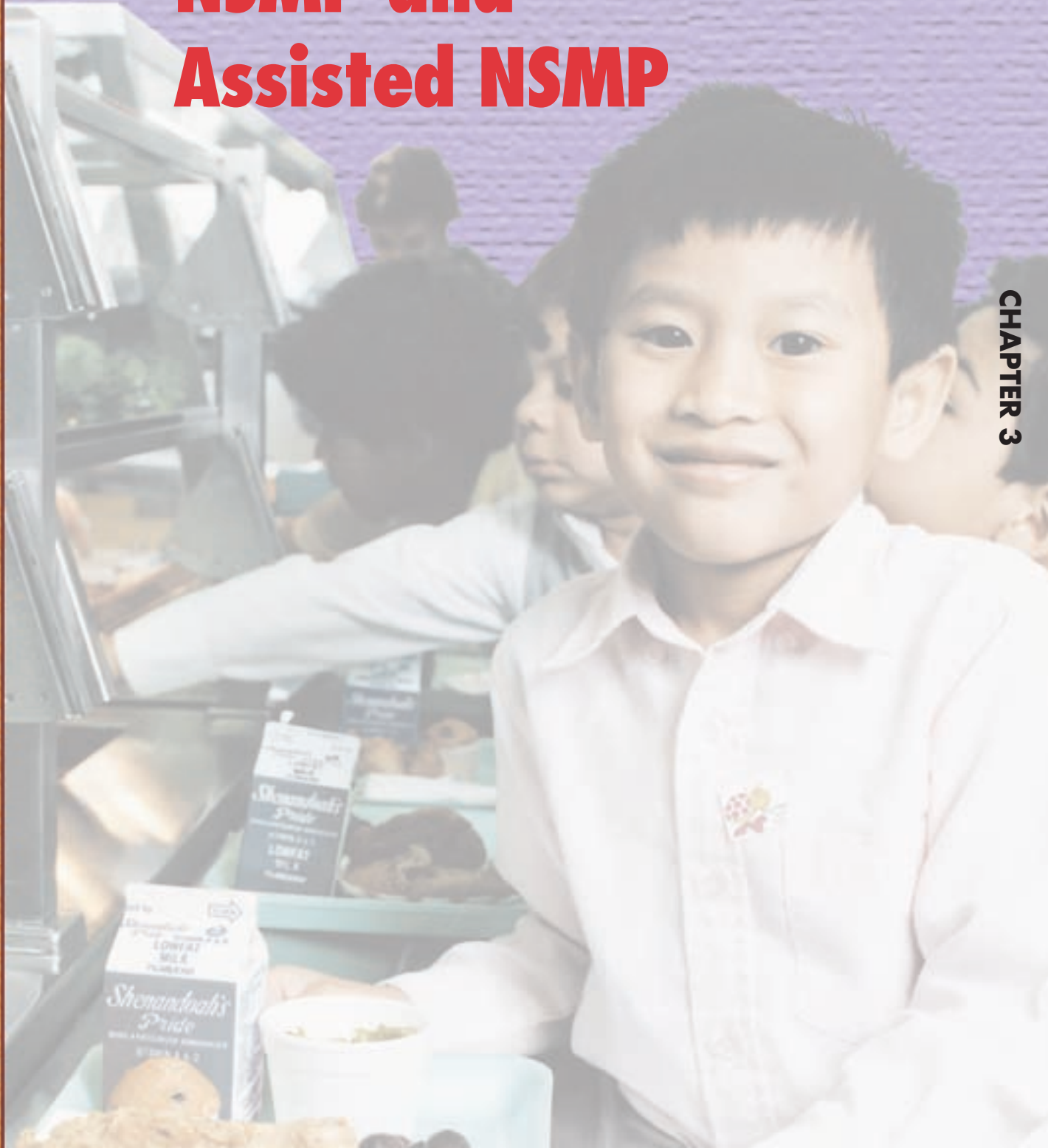


CHAPTER 3

A MENU PLANNER
FOR HEALTHY SCHOOL MEALS

Nutrient-Based Menu Planning: NSMP and Assisted NSMP

CHAPTER 3



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Nutrient-Based Menu Planning: NSMP and Assisted NSMP

In this chapter, we'll take a closer look at Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (NSMP) and Assisted Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (Assisted NSMP). As we did in Chapter 2 for Food-Based Menu Planning, we'll look at the following areas:



- Nutrition Goals
- Nutrient Standards and Age/Grade Groups
- Criteria for a Reimbursable Meal
- Meal Structure for Lunch
- Meal Structure for Breakfast
- Offer versus Serve for Lunch
- Offer versus Serve for Breakfast
- Standardized Recipes
- Processed Foods
- Production Records
- Child Nutrition Labeling

For easy reference, these features are summarized in the chart in Appendix 2. Appendix 1 summarizes these features for Food-Based Menu Planning.

Both NSMP and Assisted NSMP use computerized nutrient analysis of menus as planning tools. When averaged over a school week, this menu analysis must meet the nutrient standards for specific age/grade groups.

First, an overview...

As we saw in Chapter 1, NSMP and Assisted NSMP take a Nutrient-Based approach to menu planning. Planning is done with the help of USDA-approved computer software that is specifically programmed to help you put together menus that meet the nutrition goals established by the *School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children*.

With NSMP, you use the computer software to plan menus and do nutrient analysis. With Assisted NSMP, an outside consultant or other agency (such as the state agency or another school district) does the menu planning and nutrient analysis, based on local preferences.

Unlike Food-Based Menu Planning, NSMP and Assisted NSMP do not use meal patterns with required food components and food items. In fact, there are no required foods *except* fluid milk. Instead of *food components*, planners work with *menu and food items*. This will be explained in more detail later.

Many menu planners using Nutrient-Based Menu Planning like the flexibility it gives them in selecting foods and responding to customer preferences. It may be easier, for example, to provide vegetarian and ethnic selections. This flexibility might make planning within a budget easier, too.

In addition, because the nutrient analysis is done before the menu is served, there is immediate feedback on compliance with the nutrition goals. This can be used for marketing healthy school meals as well as planning them.



1. Nutrition Goals

- **What are the nutrition goals for Nutrient-Based Menu Planning? How will your menus be reviewed for compliance with them?**

Your objective with Nutrient-Based Menu Planning is to plan menus that meet the nutrition goals when averaged over a school week for:

- Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA) for key nutrients
- Calories
- Dietary Guidelines

Using the USDA-approved computer software, you (or with Assisted NSMP, an outside consultant or agency) plan weekly menus that are measured by nutrient analysis of foods. For review purposes, your state agency will review your nutrient analysis procedure and data entry. This will ensure you are doing nutrient analysis correctly and meeting nutrition goals.

For NSMP and Assisted NSMP, the chart in Appendix 2 states:

Menus must meet nutrition goals when averaged over a school week.

Requires computerized nutrient analysis of planned menus for: RDA (Recommended Dietary Allowances) for key nutrients; calories; and Dietary Guidelines measures. USDA-approved software must be used for computerized nutrient analysis.

2. Nutrient Standards and Age/Grade Groups

- **What are the nutrient standards for NSMP and Assisted NSMP? How do nutrient standards relate to age/grade groups with this approach?**

As we saw in Chapter 1, nutrient standards are the required levels of calories and key nutrients to meet the nutrition goals set by the *School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children*. The nutrient standards for healthy school meals were established for all of the menu planning systems by studying the nutritional needs of groups of children of different ages. There are different nutrient standards for different age/grade groups of children.

What is new with NSMP and Assisted NSMP is *the way you plan meals* to achieve the nutrient standards — and the opportunity to develop customized age groups, if you wish.



■ **How do age/grade groups work with NSMP and Assisted NSMP?**
Why is there flexibility in targeting meals to children of different ages?

Looking under “Nutrient Standards and Age/Grade Groups” on the chart in Appendix 2, you will see the following for NSMP and Assisted NSMP:

Minimum of two established age/grade groups: Grades K-6 and Grades 7-12 (plus optional third group for Grades K-3). There are different nutrient standards for each of these three groups.

Optional established age groups and nutrient standards.

Optional customized age groups and nutrient standards.

In other words, you have three ways to approach age/grade groups and nutrient standards with NSMP and Assisted NSMP. The approach you select will depend on the needs of your school and your preferences. The USDA-computer software includes instructions for each approach and has been programmed to allow you to select the one you prefer.



What are the three ways you can approach age/grade groups and nutrient standards?

1) You can choose to plan by *grade* groups. For K-12 schools, you will need to use at least the two established groups for lunch and the one established group for breakfast.

For *lunches* planned with NSMP and Assisted NSMP, the established and optional grade groups are the same as those used with Enhanced Food-Based Menu Planning. In other words:

For K-12 schools, you will need to use a minimum of two established grade groups. One is for Grades K-6. The other is for Grades 7-12.

If you wish, you can also use a third, optional grade group, which USDA recommends but does not require. This is for Grades K-3.

For *breakfasts* planned with NSMP and Assisted NSMP, there is one established grade group — for Grades K-12. In addition, there is an optional extra grade group — for Grades 7-12. Using this extra group is recommended, but not required.

The charts on pages 65 and 66 show the nutrient standards for lunch and breakfast for these grade groups. As the charts show, there is also a grade group for preschool.

2) You can use a set of *established age* groups.

Instead of using grade groups, you can plan by age group. This approach might be helpful to you if for some reason your school doesn't have traditional grades. There are four established age groups built into the computer software. They are in years:

- Ages 3-6
- Ages 7-10
- Ages 11-13
- Ages 14 and older

The charts on pages 67 and 68 show nutrient standards for lunch and breakfast for these age groups.

3) You can develop your own *customized age* groups. This method allows you to most accurately target the nutrient needs of the children you serve.

Following the instructions in the software, you can develop customized groups to reflect the ages of the children in your school. See page 70 for more information on using customized age groups.



The charts on the next four pages show the minimum requirements for lunches and breakfasts planned with NSMP and Assisted NSMP. In each case, the charts show *school week averages* for:

- Calories — also called “Energy Allowances.”
- Five key nutrients — protein, calcium, iron, vitamin A, and vitamin C.
- Total fat — not to exceed 30 percent of calories over a school week.
- Saturated fat — to be less than 10 percent of calories over a school week.

Note that for both total fat and saturated fat, the grams of fat will vary depending on the calorie level. Also keep in mind that the percent of calories from saturated fat is part of the percent of calories from total fat.



For LUNCHES Planned with NSMP and Assisted NSMP...**If You Are Using Grade Groups,
The Nutrient Standards* Are:**

Age/Grade Group:	Preschool	Grades K-6	Grades 7-12	Grades K-3 Optional
Energy Allowances (Calories = cal.)	517 cal.	664 cal.	825 cal.	633 cal.
Protein (grams = g)	7 g	10 g	16 g	9 g
Calcium (milligrams = mg)	267 mg	286 mg	400 mg	267 mg
Iron (milligrams = mg)	3.3 mg	3.5 mg	4.5 mg	3.3 mg
Vitamin A (Retinol Equivalents = RE)	150 RE	224 RE	300 RE	200 RE
Vitamin C (milligrams = mg)	14 mg	15 mg	18 mg	15 mg
Total fat	No more than 30 percent of total calories should come from fat.			
Saturated fat	Less than 10 percent of total calories should come from saturated fat.			

Remember these important points: (1) This chart shows *minimum school week averages* for nutrients except for fat and saturated fat. (2) Fat should not exceed 30 percent of calories over a school week; and *saturated* fat should be less than 10 percent of calories over a school week. In addition, be aware that for both total fat and saturated fat, the grams of fat will vary depending on the calorie level.

* **NOTE:** These standards may change over time to reflect new nutrition knowledge. As they are updated, USDA will notify your state agency.



For BREAKFASTS Planned with NSMP and Assisted NSMP...

**If You Are Using Grade Groups,
The Nutrient Standards* Are:**

Age/Grade Group:	Preschool	Grades K-12	Grades 7-12 Optional
Energy Allowances (Calories = cal.)	388 cal.	554 cal.	618 cal.
Protein (grams = g)	5 g	10 g	12 g
Calcium (milligrams = mg)	200 mg	257 mg	300 mg
Iron (milligrams = mg)	2.5 mg	3.0 mg	3.4 mg
Vitamin A (Retinol Equivalents = RE)	113 RE	197 RE	225 RE
Vitamin C (milligrams = mg)	11 mg	13 mg	14 mg
Total fat	No more than 30 percent of total calories should come from fat.		
Saturated fat	Less than 10 percent of total calories should come from saturated fat.		

Remember these important points: (1) This chart shows *minimum school week averages* for nutrients except for fat and saturated fat. (2) Fat should not exceed 30 percent of calories over a school week; and *saturated* fat should be less than 10 percent of calories over a school week. In addition, be aware that for both total fat and saturated fat, the grams of fat will vary depending on the calorie level.

* **NOTE:** These standards may change over time to reflect new nutrition knowledge. As they are updated, USDA will notify your state agency.



For LUNCHES Planned with NSMP and Assisted NSMP...***If You Are Using Established Age Groups,
The Nutrient Standards* Are:***

Age/Grade Group:	Ages 3-6	Ages 7-10	Ages 11-13	Ages 14 and older
Energy Allowances (Calories = cal.)	558 cal.	667 cal.	783 cal.	846 cal.
Protein (grams = g)	7.3 g	9.3 g	15.0 g	16.7 g
Calcium (milligrams = mg)	267 mg	267 mg	400 mg	400 mg
Iron (milligrams = mg)	2.5 mg	2.5 mg	3.4 mg	3.4 mg
Vitamin A (Retinol Equivalents = RE)	158 RE	233 RE	300 RE	300 RE
Vitamin C (milligrams = mg)	14.6 mg	15.0 mg	16.7 mg	19.2 mg
Total fat	No more than 30 percent of total calories should come from fat.			
Saturated fat	Less than 10 percent of total calories should come from saturated fat.			

Remember these important points: (1) This chart shows *minimum school week averages* for nutrients except for fat and saturated fat. (2) Fat should not exceed 30 percent of calories over a school week; and *saturated* fat should be less than 10 percent of calories over a school week. In addition, be aware that for both total fat and saturated fat, the grams of fat will vary depending the calorie level.

*** NOTE:** These standards may change over time to reflect new nutrition knowledge. As they are updated, USDA will notify your state agency.



For BREAKFASTS Planned with NSMP and Assisted NSMP...

**If You Are Using Established Age Groups,
The Nutrient Standards* Are:**

Age/Grade Group:	Ages 3-6	Ages 7-10	Ages 11-13	Ages 14 and older
Energy Allowances (Calories = cal.)	419 cal.	500 cal.	588 cal.	625 cal.
Protein (grams = g)	5.50 g	7.00 g	11.25 g	12.50 g
Calcium (milligrams = mg)	200 mg	200 mg	300 mg	300 mg
Iron (milligrams = mg)	2.5 mg	2.5 mg	3.4 mg	3.4 mg
Vitamin A (Retinol Equivalents = RE)	119 RE	175 RE	225 RE	225 RE
Vitamin C (milligrams = mg)	11.00 mg	11.25 mg	12.50 mg	14.40 mg
Total fat	No more than 30 percent of total calories should come from fat.			
Saturated fat	Less than 10 percent of total calories should come from saturated fat.			

Remember these important points: (1) This chart shows minimum *school week averages* for nutrients except for fat and saturated fat. (2) Fat should not exceed 30 percent of calories over a school week; and *saturated* fat should be less than 10 percent of calories over a school week. In addition, be aware that for both total fat and saturated fat, the grams of fat will vary depending on the calorie level.

* **NOTE:** These standards may change over time to reflect new nutrition knowledge. As they are updated, USDA will notify your state agency.

What if your school's grade structure does not match the established age or grade groups?

As we've seen, an important part of your menu planning will be identifying the grade or age groups you will use. While many schools' grade structures will match the established groups, some will not. If this is true for your schools, you can easily determine how to group grades or ages by following this rule:

- **If only one age or grade is outside the established range of K-6 or 7-12...**
you may use the *one* age or grade group into which most of the children fit.
- **However, if more than one age or grade is outside of the established range...**
you will need to use two grade or age groups.

Here is an example:

Some food service directors are planning lunches for four schools. The first school has Grades K through 8. The second has Grades 5 through 8. The third has Grades 6 through 9, and the fourth, K through 7.

Knowing that the two established grade groups are K-6 and 7-12, here is what the planners do and why:

For the Grades K-8 school...

Grade 7 and Grade 8 are both beyond the K-6 range, so the planners know they cannot use K-6 for all of the children. They decide to use both established grade groups — K-6 and 7-12.

For the Grades 5-8 school...

Here, too, there is more than one grade outside of the established range. Grade 5 is two grades *below* the Grade 7-12 range. And Grade 8 is two grades *above* the K-6 range. Once again, the menu planners use both established grade groups — K-6 and 7-12.

For the Grades 6-9 school...

The menu planners use the 7-12 grade group for all of the children. They can do this because Grade 6 is the only grade below the established range of 7-12.

For the Grades K-7 school...

The menu planners use the K-6 grade group. They can do this because Grade 7 is the only grade above the established range of K-6.



What about using customized age groups?

If you choose to use age groups in planning meals with NSMP or Assisted NSMP, you may want to stay with the *established* age groups. These will already be programmed into any USDA-approved software. As we've seen, there are four established age groups. In years, they are:

- Ages 3-6
- Ages 7-10
- Ages 11-13
- Ages 14 and older

However, since not all school districts are divided into these four age groups, the NSMP software will also allow you to create your own *customized* age groups. In fact, to most accurately target the nutrient needs of the children you serve, this is the recommended method.

The process involves three main steps. You will:

- 1) Decide what age groups are appropriate for your school or schools.** Keep in mind that you must use at least two age groups with any school that has Grades K-12. Also remember that when there is a wide range of ages and grades, it is recommended that the age group break be right at or above the sixth grade level.
- 2) Determine the appropriate nutrient standards for these new groups.** The computer will do this by weighting, combining, and/or averaging the RDA for different age groups. While this sounds complicated, the software is set up to accomplish this. You will simply enter the age grouping into the computer. The software program will complete the calculations.
- 3) Incorporate into the software the customized age groups you have developed.** Whenever you want to see the nutrient standards for these groups, the computer will figure them out and show them to you.





Why is sixth grade such an important dividing line?

As you can see from the established age and grade groups — as well as from the guidelines for customizing new age groups — sixth grade marks an important dividing line for menu planners.

This is because one of the greatest jumps in children's calorie and nutrient needs occurs between ages 10 and 11 years, which is generally between Grades 5 and 6.

If one grade or age is added on either side of the 10-to-11 age break, there is not too much difference in the RDA requirements for each nutrient. However, when several grades or ages are added on either side of the 10-to-11 age break, either...

...too few nutrients and calories will be provided for children age 11 years and older.

- OR -

...too many calories and too much fat will be provided for children age 10 years and younger.



3. Criteria for a Reimbursable Meal

■ **To qualify for reimbursement, what must a lunch include? What must a breakfast include?**

Under NSMP and Assisted NSMP, a reimbursable meal must contain a minimum of *three menu items*. This is true for lunch and breakfast; however, as we'll see below, the three menu items are not the same for both meals.

In addition, a reimbursable meal must *meet the nutrient standard* for the appropriate age or grade group when the nutrients in those foods are averaged over a school week. This can be accomplished by following the instructions in the USDA-approved software.

Let's look at how these criteria are summarized in the chart in Appendix 2. The chart states that a reimbursable meal:

- *Contains at least three menu items.*
- *Meets the nutrient standards for the appropriate grade or age groups when averaged over 1 school week's menu.*

Below and on the next few pages, we'll see what each of these statements means in terms of day-to-day menu planning. Then, later in this chapter, we'll spend more time looking at menu items under "Meal Structure."

The first statement in Appendix 2 under "Criteria for a Reimbursable Meal" reads: *Contains at least three menu items*. Looking at this more closely, we'll want to know: What is a menu item? What are the three menu items a lunch must include? What are the three menu items a breakfast must include?

■ **What is a menu item?**

A menu item may be any single food or combination of foods *except*: (1) a condiment or (2) a food of minimal nutritional value not included in a menu item.

Condiments include such items as relishes, catsup, mustard, jelly, gravies, and table spreads.

Foods of minimal nutritional value include such things as chewing gum, soda water, water ices, and certain candies. See Appendix 7 for definition under USDA regulations.

There are three *categories* of menu items:

- Entrees
- Milk
- Side Dishes

■ **What three menu items must a LUNCH include?**

A lunch planned with NSMP or Assisted NSMP must include AT LEAST these *three* menu items:

- 1) **Fluid milk served as a beverage.**
- 2) **An entree.** An entree is a combination of foods or a single food item offered as the main course. The entree is the central focus of the meal and forms the framework around which the rest of the meal is planned.
- 3) **A side dish.** This can be any other food except a condiment or a food of minimal nutritional value.

■ **What three menu items must a BREAKFAST include?**

A breakfast planned with NSMP or Assisted NSMP must include AT LEAST these *three* menu items:

- 1) **Fluid milk served as a beverage or on cereal or both.**
- 2) **A side dish.** This can be any other food except a condiment or a food of minimal nutritional value.
- 3) **Another side dish.** This also can be any other food except a condiment or one of minimal nutritional value.



Now let's look at the second statement in Appendix 2 under "Criteria for a Reimbursable Meal." It reads: *Meets the nutrient standards for the appropriate grade or age groups when averaged over 1 school week's menu.*

Earlier in this chapter and also in Chapter 1, we looked at nutrient standards and how they relate to age and grade groups. But, what does "over 1 school week's menu" mean in practical terms — for example, what about weeks that are longer or shorter than 5 days? And, what foods count for nutrient analysis? Here are some answers.

■ **How is "school week" defined? What about weeks that are longer or shorter than 5 days?**

For NSMP and Assisted NSMP, a school week is defined as a minimum of 3 consecutive days and a maximum of 7 consecutive days. If there are fewer than 3 consecutive days in a week, the days in that week are combined with the coming or prior week for nutrient analysis.

For example, in many areas there are only 2 days of school during Thanksgiving week. Those 2 days could be combined with the week before Thanksgiving, or the week after. The same could be done for other holiday periods or during the first and last weeks of school.

By combining weeks in this way, the menu planner avoids problems in meeting the nutrient standards that can arise out of analyzing a small sample of meals.



■ What foods count for NUTRIENT ANALYSIS? Are condiments included?

All foods served in a meal, including condiments, are included in the nutrient analysis and count toward meeting the nutrient standards for the meal. (Condiments do not count as required menu items.)

However, foods or menu items that are considered foods of minimal nutritional value under USDA regulations — such as chewing gum, soda water, water ices, and certain candies (see Appendix 7) — can only be included in the nutrient analysis calculations if they are part of a menu item.

It's important to note that *only* foods for *reimbursable* meals are included in the nutrient analysis. Foods for a la carte or adult sales are *not* included in the nutrient analysis.

4. Meal Structure for Lunch

The chart in Appendix 2 states:

A minimum of three menu items must be offered: an entree, milk, and at least one side dish.

- *Offer an entree: an entree is a single food item or a combination of foods served as the main dish.*
- *Offer fluid milk as a beverage.*
- *Offer at least one side dish; may be any food item except a condiment or a food of minimal nutritional value that is not part of a menu item.*

As we've already seen on page 72, a menu item may be any single food or combination of foods *except* (1) a condiment or (2) a food of minimal nutritional value not included in a menu item. Now let's look at *what* foods count as menu items and *how* you will count menu items that include more than one food.



■ What foods count as menu items?

Under NSMP and Assisted NSMP all foods — *except* condiments and foods of minimal nutritional value not served as part of a menu item — count as menu items.

In the example on page 43, we saw that with Food-Based Menu Planning chocolate pudding generally would *not* count as a food item. In contrast, with NSMP and Assisted NSMP, chocolate pudding would count as a menu item (but not as a substitute for fluid milk served as a beverage).

■ How do you count foods like a hamburger with a bun? Is this one menu item or two?

This depends on how it is *served*. If a menu item includes two (or more) foods but is served as *one* dish, it is considered *one* menu item because students cannot choose to take some of the foods without the others.

On the other hand, if those same two foods are served in a manner that allows students to choose each separately, they are considered *two* menu items.

As the menu planner at the local level, *you* determine how food items are served and, therefore, how menu items are counted. For example:

If you serve “Hamburger on a Bun”...

... and the student does not have the choice of taking either the hamburger or the bun separately...

this counts as ONE menu item.

If you serve “Hamburger Patty” and “Bun”...

... and the student can choose one or the other or both...

this counts as TWO menu items.

Both of these options are shown in the screened box on the next page, along with two other examples.



One menu item or two? It depends on you...

You are planning lunch with NSMP. Will the foods you have chosen count as one menu item or two? How you serve them is the deciding factor.

In the examples below, foods are listed in two columns. The first column shows foods that will be served together as a unit. These will count as one menu item because students cannot choose to take only some of the foods.

The second column shows foods that will be offered in the same meal, but this time students *can* select them separately. In this case, the foods will count as two menu items.



One Menu Item	Two Menu Items
Hamburger on a Bun	Hamburger Patty Bun
Turkey and Gravy on Mashed Potatoes	Turkey and Gravy Mashed Potatoes
Burrito Grande (Tortilla, Beans, Rice, Tomato, Lettuce, Salsa)	Bean Burrito Spanish Rice

As you think about how you will serve and count menu items, remember that the real test of your menu planning is the nutrient analysis averaged over a week. This analysis will tell you if you are reaching the required nutrient and calorie standards.

5. Meal Structure for Breakfast

The chart in Appendix 2 states:

A minimum of three menu items must be offered: milk and at least two side dishes.

- Offer fluid milk as a beverage or on cereal or both.
- Offer at least two side dishes; may be any food items except a condiment or a food of minimal nutritional value that is not part of a menu item.

For information on how to count menu items, see page 76.

COMPARING BREAKFAST AND LUNCH:

For NSMP and Assisted NSMP, Minimum Required Menu Items Are...

Three Menu Items for BREAKFAST...

One... Fluid milk
served as
a beverage
or on cereal
or both

Two and three...

Any two other foods
except (1) a condiment
or (2) a food of minimal
nutritional value that is
not part of a menu item

Three Menu Items for LUNCH...

One... Fluid milk
served as a
beverage

Two... An entree

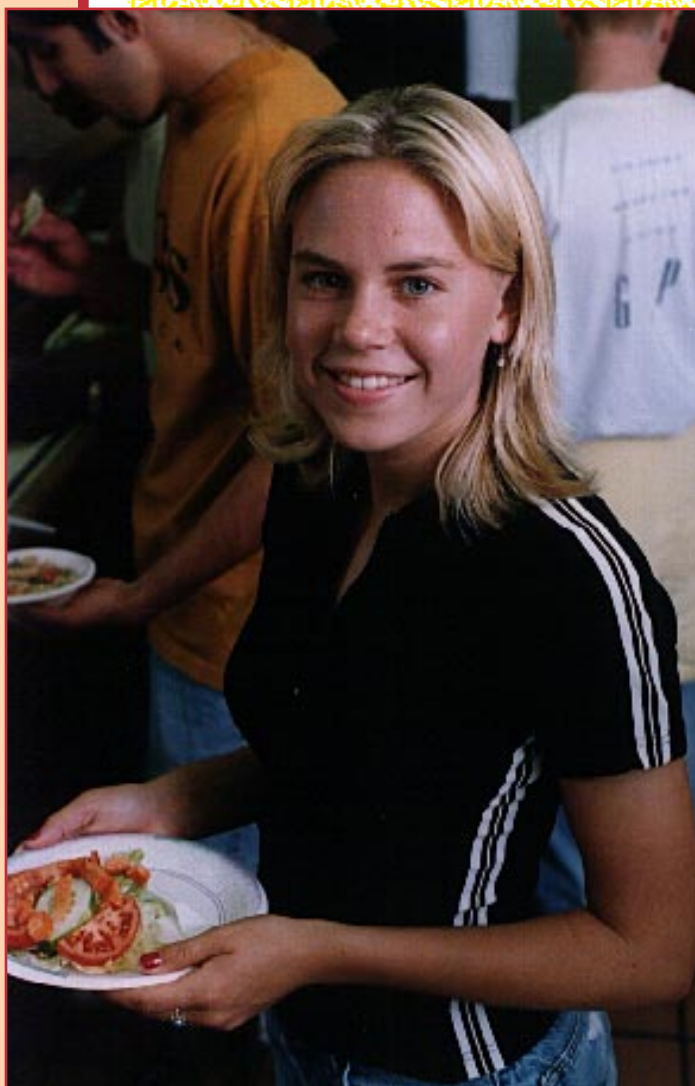
Three... Any other food
except (1) a condiment
or (2) a food of minimal
nutritional value that is
not part of a menu item

What about salad bars and other theme bars?

In many schools, theme bars are popular with students. Offerings range from salads, to pasta, tacos, potatoes — and more. Some schools serve complete lunches or breakfasts this way. Others offer only side dishes. Just as theme bars work well with Food-Based Menu Planning, they also work well with Nutrient-Based Menu Planning.

Schools using NSMP and Assisted NSMP may serve lunch this way as long as it consists of at least: (1) an entree; (2) fluid milk served as a beverage; and (3) one other menu item. Schools may serve breakfast this way as long as it consists of at least fluid milk and two other menu items.

Condiments and foods of minimal nutritional value do not count as menu items. For nutrient analysis, however, you will include condiments and foods of minimal nutritional value that are part of menu items.



6. Offer versus Serve (OVS) for Lunch

■ How does Offer versus Serve (OVS) work for lunch with NSMP and Assisted NSMP? Are the goals of OVS still the same?

With NSMP and Assisted NSMP, OVS works as follows for lunch:

- Schools must offer students at least three menu items: an entree, fluid milk, and another menu item.
- Students must select at least two of the three menu items. One of the two menu items selected must be an entree.
- If more than three menu items are offered as a meal unit, students may decline no more than two menu items of the meal unit. (Students can never decline the entree.)

For an OVS meal to qualify as reimbursable, it must contain certain combinations of foods. Menu planners need to make sure cashiers and students can identify at the “point of service” which combinations of food items qualify as a reimbursable meal.

Senior high schools are required to have OVS for lunch. Local school food authorities can choose whether or not they want to have OVS for their junior high, middle, and elementary schools.

The goals of OVS are the same as they have always been — to minimize plate waste and encourage schools to offer more food choices. For more information on the benefits of OVS, see page 52. For more information on OVS and Nutrient-Based Menu Planning, see Appendix 5.

7. Offer versus Serve (OVS) for Breakfast

■ What is the goal of OVS for breakfast with NSMP and Assisted NSMP? How does OVS work for breakfast?

The goal of OVS for breakfast is the same as for lunch. OVS at breakfast is optional at all grade levels. *Here’s how it works:* Students may decline a maximum of one menu item out of the three or more required menu items offered.

As we noted above, for an OVS meal to qualify as reimbursable, it must contain certain combinations of foods. Menu planners need to make sure cashiers and students can identify at the “point of service” which combinations of food items qualify as a reimbursable meal.



Determining a reimbursable OVS lunch:

Below are two menus. For each, there is a list of possible reimbursable meals, along with the reasons why these meals would qualify as OVS lunches with NSMP and Assisted NSMP.

• MENU #1

For these menu items...

Taco Salad
Watermelon Wedge
Choice of Milk

The possible reimbursable meals are...

1. Taco Salad, Watermelon Wedge, Milk
2. Taco Salad and Watermelon Wedge
3. Taco Salad and Milk

The rationale is...

1. Students must take an entree.
2. Students may decline only one menu item when the minimum of three menu items are offered as a meal unit.

• MENU #2

For these menu items...

Taco
Refried Beans
Rice
Watermelon Wedge
Choice of Milk

There are many possible reimbursable meals. Here are some of them:

1. Taco, Refried Beans, Rice
2. Taco, Rice, Watermelon Wedge
3. Taco, Watermelon Wedge, Milk
4. Taco, Refried Beans, Watermelon Wedge
5. Taco, Refried Beans, Milk
6. Taco, Rice, Milk

The rationale is...

1. Students must take an entree.
2. Students may decline no more than two menu items if more than three are offered as a meal unit.

8. Standardized Recipes

■ Are standardized recipes required with NSMP and Assisted NSMP? Where can you get standardized recipes for school meals?

Standardized recipes are an important management tool in any food service program. They are highly recommended for all menu planning systems, and they *are required* for NSMP and Assisted NSMP.

Standardized recipes help ensure that the correct portion size is served to all students. In addition, when state agency representatives analyze the menus to check for compliance with the nutrition goals, they will need to know which recipes were used and have copies of those recipes.

Standardized recipes and preparation techniques should be used for all menu items that have two or more ingredients or that require any preparation.

Sources of standardized recipes include the following. These are also listed with additional information in Appendix 3:

- *USDA Quantity Recipes for Schools*
- *A Tool Kit for Healthy School Meals: Recipes and Training Materials*
- *The School Lunch Challenge I, II, and III Recipes*



Shown here is Chicken Stir-Fry from USDA's *A Tool Kit for Healthy School Meals: Recipes and Training Materials*. See Appendix 3 for more information.

9. Processed Foods

■ When using processed foods, such as brand-name products, how will you get the information you need for nutrient analysis?

When you are using processed foods, it's important to have nutrition information for the products you are using. While one manufacturer's product may have the same name as another's, the ingredients can vary greatly.

For example, two different manufacturers may offer a vegetarian chili, but it is unlikely both will use the same ingredients in identical proportions. One may put in twice as many kidney beans, for instance, or maybe only half as many tomatoes. One producer's chili may have more fat than another's. As a result, the nutrient content of the two products will be very different.

How will you get the information you need?

In many instances, this information will already be programmed into the USDA-approved software as part of the Child Nutrition Database (CN Database). The CN Database contains files that list food items and nutrients. You will find information on:

- Reference foods commonly used by schools
- USDA commodity foods
- USDA quantity recipes for school food service
- Brand-name processed foods used in schools
- USDA's *Food Buying Guide*

These files are “locked” in order to keep them accurate and reliable. This means you can see and use what is in them but cannot add, delete, or alter information.

You can, however, open up and work with the empty files included in the software. These allow you to develop your own local database. If you plan to offer a food item but do not find it listed in the CN Database, you will need to obtain the nutrient analysis from the product's food label or by contacting the manufacturer, then enter the information into your database.

Foods that are included in the reference foods of the CN Database, such as basic condiments, canned vegetables, fruits, etc., can be used without obtaining brand-name analysis.



10. Production Records

■ Are production records required for NSMP and Assisted NSMP?

Yes, program regulations require schools to keep food production and menu records. For example, you will need to keep records of:

- Menus
- Product specifications
- Recipes and preparation methods
- Projected production of menu items
- Number of reimbursable meals

See Chapter 7 for sample production records.

11. Child Nutrition Labeling

■ Does the Child Nutrition Labeling Program apply to NSMP and Assisted NSMP?

CN labels on products show the product's contribution toward meal pattern requirements. Because NSMP and Assisted NSMP do not use meal patterns as planning tools, CN Labeling does not apply to these menu planning systems. However, schools can serve CN-labeled products in meals planned with NSMP and Assisted NSMP.

The CN-labeled product may already be in the Child Nutrition Database that is part of the USDA-approved software. If the CN-labeled product is not in the Child Nutrition Database, you can enter into your local database the nutrient information you have obtained from the product's label or from the manufacturer.

For more information on CN labeling as used with Traditional and Enhanced Food-Based Menu Planning, see Appendix 6.

